

Northwestern

OFFICE OF COMMUNITY
ENRICHMENT
Education

GLO + OCE Education Team Reading Group

Book: *When Rain Clouds Gather* by Bessie Head

Larger Themes

- Decolonization as an emotional blueprint: interior transformations for both colonized and colonizer.
- Agriculture as metaphor: emotional fertility, light vs. darkness.
- Political transitions in Botswana vs. South Africa; hope and exhaustion in state formations.
- Individual and collective needs: how are they met, ignored, or transformed?
- Poverty without shame: what would a world look like where poverty has no moral stigma?
- Friendship and mutuality (Makhaya & Gilbert).
- Gender structures and resistance.

Discussion Questions

- What do you think of the book overall? Which passages or elements resonate with you? Which are confusing?
- Why is agriculture so central to the novel? How is it operating metaphorically?
- What state formations does Bessie Head describe? How do characters relate to them? How is this a moment of political transition?
- What are the major needs of the characters (individual and collective)? Who/what addresses them—or fails to?
- What does Mma Millipede mean when she says: “You must never, never put anyone away from you as not being your brother. Because of this great burden, no one can be put away from you.” How does this connect to the novel’s framework for decolonization?
- What would a world look like where poverty carried no shame? How would it change our systems and relationships?
- How does Makhaya’s friendship with Gilbert function as a model for decolonizing work?
- How does gender structure life in Golem Mmidi? How do characters like Makhaya and Pauline resist?